



# RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS, AND TEMPLES AND SHRINES OF MAYONG

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## ABSTRACT

Known as the city of magic, Mayong is a prominent place in Assam. The eastern landmass of mahapeeth Kamakhya belonging to ancient Kamarupa, as recorded in the Puranic texts, is Mayong. Though Ancient Kamrupa or Assam was famous for tantra mantras, the Mayong region is still renowned for its practice of black magic. Mayong is also notable in the religious aspect. Since ancient times, Shaiva and Shakta religions have gained special prominence in the Mayong region. Regarding the intensity of devotion, and spreading spiritual, moral and social education, religious rituals, songs, worship, and sacrifices have been given special importance in Mayong since ancient times. Mayong's religious traditions and temples will be highlighted in this research paper.

**KEYWORDS:** Dharma, Tantra, Mantra, Bej, Tantrik

## THE OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH:

Mayong is one of the most famous places in India as well as in Assam. The objectives of the paper entitled Religious Traditions and Temples of Mayong are:

- 1) To inform about the customs and practices of religious festivals in the Mayong region.
- 2) To study the movable and immovable temples and monuments of Mayong.

## Research methodology:

Descriptive and analytical methods have been followed in preparing this research paper.

## Sources:

The present research paper is based on field studies and personal interviews conducted in the Mayong region. The aid of various books is also taken.

## Review of previous literature:

Various books have been consulted in preparing this paper. These books are listed in the bibliography section of the research paper.

## DISCUSSION:

Mayong is the land of tantra-mantra and magic. It has been the popular center of religious traditions, magic spells, and tantra practices since ancient times. Various clay sculptures, rock sculptures, inscriptions, and architecture (temples, caves) are still found in Mayong. Mayong has been a part of Kampitha since ancient times, and Shaivism and Shaktism were practised in this region. In addition to the practice of Shakta and Shaiva religious traditions, the statues of several deities were also worshipped in Mayong. The people popularly sang many religious songs like *Apeswari Naam*, *Gosani Naam*, *Shiva-Parvati Naam*, etc., which are orally transmitted. Many temples and sculptures are found at various places in Mayong, which signify the prevalence of the Ganapatya religion together with Shaivism and Shaktism.

Glancing at the religious traditions of Mayong, it can be drawn that Shaivism and Shaktism have been predominant in Mayong since ancient times. The practice of tantra-mantra has been prevalent in Mayong since the seventh and eighth centuries. The tantra practitioners worshipped Shiva and Parvati, the god and goddess of power. Many ceremonies and rituals, including buffalo and human sacrifice were performed for Shakti practices. There was a *Kechaikhai Than* in each village where human sacrifices were offered for the welfare of the village. People were sacrificed at the *Kechaikhai Than* in Burha Mayong. Most of the *Peeths* in Mayong are Shakti *Peeths*.

Shakti religion had a widespread influence in Assam before Sankaradeva preached Vaishnavism. In 1668 AD, Ananta Thakur Ata alias Hridayananda Kayastha Ata, a disciple of Sankaradeva, came to Mayong and established a satra on the bank of *Kalshira Beel* to spread Vaishnavism. Since then, the Vaishnava religious tradition has also been started in Mayong. Ananta Thakur Ata composed three books including *Sri Ram Kirtan* and *Bhakti Premlata* in the bank of *Kalshira Beel*. This Kalshira Satra was washed away by the flood of the river

Brahmaputra and was later established at Nabahatia. People started embracing Vaishnavism since then.

Mayong is also known as the land of the *Pancha Devata*. After worshipping the five *gosai*, the people of Mayong worship other thirty-three crore gods. This *gosai uliowa utsav* celebrated by the people of all religious traditions including Shakta, Shaiva, and Vaishnava is an original festival of Mayong. This festival has been celebrated since the days of Sharasha Chandra Singha, the tenth king of Mayong. The idols of Vasudeva, Narayana, Gopal, Lakshmi Narayan, and Shiva were brought to Mayong by King Sharasha Chandra on a pilgrimage to Navadvipa. These five idols were worshipped, and the *Gosai Mela* festival was celebrated by everyone, regardless of caste and religion. The main victory chant of the people of Mayong is—

"Jai Pancha Devatar Jai (Victory to Pancha Devata)

Jai Mayangar Pancha Devatar Jai" (Victory to Mayong's Pancha Devata)

This festival is Vaishnavite but attended by Shaivites, Shaktites, Tantriks, and Bejs. This festival carries the legacy of 349 years in Mayong. The festival is celebrated on the fourth, fifth, and sixth day of the Assamese month Bohag, every year at three different places in Mayong. There are some similarities between this festival and the Jonbil Mela. Mayang has many other festivals, including the Gosai Uliowa Festival, the Garh Bhanga Festival, the Nauka Khanda Festival, the Mohkheda Festival, the Sani Puja, the Garakhia Puja, Bhukulir Biya and so on. Several other communities in Mayong include Karbi, Koch, Boro, Garo, Tiwa, Nepali, etc., and their festivals are also celebrated in Mayong with great enthusiasm. The Bejs of Mayong worship Shiva for tantra worship and also go to the naamghar and perform nam-kirtan there. In ancient times, sacrifice was practised widely, but nowadays, the number of sacrifices has decreased significantly in Mayong, and human sacrifice has disappeared completely.

Mayong has been a place of worship for Maa Kamakhya, along with Shiva and Shakta traditions, since ancient times. This combination of the Shaiva and Shakta religious traditions led to the prevalence of the Tantric Shakti religion. Mantras are the main component of the Tantric Shakti religion. A mantra is a collection of certain letters or words. When repeatedly uttered purely, the collision of these words produces a special kind of electrical wave. It nourishes the thoughts for the desired purpose, and the collection of those words is called a mantra. Mayong is a particular center of Tantra practices. Among these tantra-mantras, one category of mantras benefits society.

On the other hand, another category of mantra (evil spells) harms society. Beneficial mantras include mantras to cure diseases, mantras to expel demons, mantras to remove poisons of snakes, insects, and fox or dog bites, mantra to catch thieves, mantras to cure back pain, and toothache, mantra to suppress enemies, fever Healing mantras, mouth-effect broken mantras, etc.. Like the beneficial mantras, the evil mantras have been used in Mayong since ancient times, and even a few such ones are still in use. Some of these evil spells are the mantra that causes quarrels, the mantra that causes oversleeping, the mantra to run away girls, mantra that sticks chair on hips, and the mantra to set harmful medicine. These mantras were used to stir up injustice or violence against the

enemy. These mantras can only be performed by worshipping and following certain rituals.

In Mayong, mantras uttered in religious beliefs are closely associated with Shaiva and Shakta religions. These mantras include ghosts, vampires, giants, Shiva worship, Nag-Nagini (snakes and serpents), religious worship, Narasimha worship, Devi worship, etc.

There are many temples in ancient Mayong where tantra, mantra, and worship were performed to save society from the bad eyes of various evil gods. In many temples and shrines, including Bhagwati Than, Garanga Mandir, Kechai Khaiti Than, Shil Gosai Than, Bairagi Than, and Shiva Than, worship and tantra mantra were performed for the well-being of all. The idols of Shiva, Parvati, Ganesha, Maa Chandi and the like, carved in the rocks, have been worshipped by the people for practising tantra and attaining results.

Shaktism and Shaivism have been particularly influential in Mayong since ancient times. The tantriks in *tantra sadhana* and the bejs in magic art worshipped Shiva. Therefore, the architectural temples and shrines in Mayong are the shrines of the Shakti gods and goddesses like Shiva, Parvati, and Kechaikhati. All the temples and shrines in Mayong are Shakti Peeths, except for five Vaishnava Gosai. Some of these Shaktipeeths or *thans* of Mayong are:

**Kasshila Shiva Temple:** This Shiva Temple was established around the 7th or 8th century AD on the bank of the Brahmaputra river north of Hatimuria village.

**Haragauri Temple of Burha Mayang:** Haragauri temple is located at Barghat, south of Burha Mayang Hills. There is a mating idol of Haragauri in this shrine.

**Ganesh Temple:** There is a massive idol of Ganesha on the Chanaka hill in Mayong, whose feet are washed away by the Brahmaputra. The picturesque natural beauty of the surroundings of the temple adds to its beauty.

**Bhagwati Than:** The pair of rock-cut sculptures worshipped as Shil Gosai at Bhagwati Than in Rajamayong symbolize Mayong's Shaiva and Shakti religions.

**Bhagwati Than:** This temple is located in the Hatimuria village of Mayong. The temple was set up during the reign of Sharasha Chandra Singha, the 10th king of Mayong.

**Burha-Burhi Than:** This than is located on the Burha-Burhi hill which is 7 km away from Mayong. The footprints of Burha-Burhi, i.e., Shiva and Parvati, have been carved in a large rock. These idols are reminiscent of the Shaiva and Shakta religions of that period.

## CONCLUSION

Mayong, the land of tantra (magical chants), has been popular in Assam and all over India for its magical and folk beliefs since ancient times. Many people who are attracted to magical practices have visited this land at least once. Speaking about heritage, Mayong has been carrying a unique legacy since ancient times. Starting with tantra, this region has its distinct folk languages and festivals. The rituals and customs of other festivals in the Mayong region are as popular as in other parts of Assam, but some exceptional festivals are celebrated in the Mayong region in some cases. After studying the religious traditions and temples of Mayong, we can draw the following conclusions:

1. Historic place Mayong is famous all over India as the 'land of magic' since ancient times getting royal patronage.
2. Regarding religious festivals, people, regardless of religion and caste, gather together every year to celebrate the gosai uliowa utsav. Being celebrated from the days of Sharasha Chandra Singha, this festival is very own to Mayong. In Mayong, Lakshmi Pooja is celebrated as the main Pooja instead of the Durga Pooja. Lakshmi Pooja is celebrated with great zeal in Mayong for the prosperity of the household and the collective wellness of people.
3. Though Mayong was famous for tantra and magical practices since ancient times, now the practices of these arts have been diminishing. Since Mayong is famous for tantra-mantra traditions, an attempt should be made to conserve these centuries-old cultures. The new generation should be taught how to be benefitted from the mantra traditions.

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